DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 523 PS 023 321

AUTHOR	Cotton, Eileen G.; Mann, George A.
TITLE	Encouraging Meaningful Parent and Family Participation: A Survey of Parent Involvement Practices in California and Texas.
REPORT NO	TAC-B-428
PUB DATE	Nov 94
NOTE	15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Middle School Association (21st, Cincinnati, OH, November 3-6, 1994).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Education; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; Parenting Skills; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Parent Teacher Conferences; Program Evaluation; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS	*California(North); *Texas(West)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out what middle school principals and teachers were doing to increase parental participation. The interview survey method was used and the instrument included questions eliciting demographic data about the schools and open-ended questions to identify methods used by the schools to increase parental support and participation. Twenty urban, suburban, and rural middle school sites in Northern California and Western Texas were studied. No inner city schools were included in the sample. The school sizes were varied, ranging from a low of 120 students with a faculty of 7, to a high of 1,080 students with a faculty of 60. Students were from wide socioeconomic levels and from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Results showed that parent participation is encouraged by improving the communication through various methods like parent teacher organizations, school councils or boards, special events, parent conferences, voice-mail, homework hotlines, and newsletters. Most principals perceived that parenting skills programs were not successful in encouraging parental involvement. The study results showed that parents had some indirect influence on school governance. It can be implied from the study results that parents are involved when their children are part of the activity. A list of 15 references and the interview questionnaire are included. (WP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

TAC-B-428

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 390 523

ENCOURAGING MEANINGFUL PARENT AND FAMILY PARTICIPATION: A SURVEY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT PRACTICES IN CALIFORNIA AND TEXAS

to be presented at the

National Middle School Association

Conference in Cincinatti, Ohio

by

Eileen G. Cotton, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
California State University, Chico
Chico, California 95929-0222

and

George A. Mann, Ed.D.
Professor of Education
West Texas A & M University
Amarillo, Texas

November, 1994

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Eileen G. Cotton

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PS 023321

Encouraging Meaningful Parent and Family Participation:
A Survey of Parent Involvement Practices
In California and Texas
by
Eileen G. Cotton and George A. Mann

Introduction and Rationale

Schools must seek and find ways to increase the participation of parents in their children's education. Educators have recently recognized that without the support of parents, students do not achieve at acceptable levels (Walberg, 1984). It is now recognized that schools will be successful only to the degree that they are successful in involving parents in the education endeavors of their children.

While current educational theorists and researchers have focused attention on the effects of parental involvement upon improving schools and student achievement, the relationship has been recognized for decades. Early writers such as McMillen (1919) and Butterworth (1928) stressed the importance of parental participation in improving the education of young children. Recently, theorists and researchers have renewed interest in the effects of parental involvement upon older children's academic performance. G. Epstein (1984), Walberg (1984), and J. Epstein (1991) reported that parent and family involvement is critically important to the academic success of students throughout all of their educational careers.

Parental and family involvement appears to be especially important to students during the middle school years. Roach, Bell and Salmeri (1989-1990) stated that "...it is of vital importance that teachers and parents cooperate in order to assist the adolescent in the journey toward maturity" (pg. 15). While educators now recognize that it is imperative for schools to find ways to increase parental and family involvement in children's education, they are unsure as to the most effective ways of doing so.

Even more basic questions concerning the nature and quality of parental involvement are now being asked by middle school educators. Does one type of parental involvement affect a child's academic performance more than other forms of involvement? What type of parental involvement do schools want? How can schools effectively encourage parental involvement in children's educational pursuits? Questions such as these were examined by Vandegrift and Greene (1992). Their inquiry began with an examination of significant elements of parental involvement in order to define it operationally. They concluded that effective parental involvement requires that parents both support and participate in their children's education. The following matrix illustrates four differing interactions possible for the two variables of support and participation which determines parental involvement using the Vandegrift and Greene rubric.

Four Types of Parents (Vandegrift & Greene, 1992, p. 58)

Type 1 + Supportive of child (i.e., often encourages) + Active participant (i.e., helps child with homework)	Type 2 - Not supportive of child (i.e., ignores child) + Active participant (i.e., comes if food is provided)
Type 3 + Supportive of child (i.e., cares for well-being) - Inactive participant (i.e., rarely comes to school activities)	Type 4 - Not supportive of child (i.e., is abusive) - Inactive participant (i.e., no communication with school

Ideally, all parents belong to Type 1, and would therefore support their children's educational endeavors and demonstrate this support with their active participation. When this occurs, there is an overall improvement in the schools (Vandegrift and Greene, 1992). Therefore, it appears to be imperative for schools to find ways to enhance parents' support of and participation in their children's academic endeavors as a primary means of improving the school and their

children's academic performance. School improvement, however, is not limited to increased students achievement scores.

Chapman (1991) reminded educators to examine "multiple outcomes, not just scores on an achievement test" (pg. 358) when assessing the quality of a school. Outcomes such as improved attendance, higher marks on report cards, and/or reduced discipline problems indicate effective school programs. Another significant outcome that is associated with effective schools and parental concern and support of children's academic programs is an increase in the number of parents who visit the school seeking ways to participate. When these outcomes are impacted by parental participation, individual students will demonstrate higher achievement. As Solomon (1991) stated, "and student can be more successful if schools link comprehensive parent involvement programs to curricula and to teaching and learning" (pg. 362).

Many contemporary theorists and researchers are attempting to identify and assess the effectiveness of specific methods that can be employed by schools to increase parental support and participation. Epstein (1991), Davies (1991), Chapman (1991), D'Angelo & Adler (1991), and Uebbing & Cooper (1992) have focused their attention to identifying and assessing the quality of methods designed to enhance parental support and participation in their children's schools and education. Their findings have been reported in journals and in meetings of learned societies. Additionally, many states have recognized the need to foster parental support and participation in children's schools and education. The states have created guidelines and initiatives designed to enhance parental support and participation. Reports of the various states efforts in their areas were made available to middle schools educators by writers such as Solomon (1991), Nardine and Morris (1991), Chrispeels (1991), Warner (1991), Davies (1991) and Chapman (1991). While the information about methods of increasing parental support and participation is available to

middle school educators, has it been used and how effective do practitioners believe the methods to be?

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to determine what middle school principals and teachers are doing to increase parent support and participation and how effective those methods are perceived to be. Twenty middle schools in the states of California and Texas were selected to be studied from rural and urban locations. The schools studied in the project served students who came from a wide range of socioeconomic levels and from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

The interview survey instrument (see Appendix A) was designed for the study. The instrument included provisions to gather demographic data for the surveyed schools and to provide opportunities for participants to respond to open-ended questions structured to identify methods used by their schools to increase parental support and participation. The questions were derived from J. Epstein's (1987) five functions of parental involvement programs and the California State Task Force on Parent Involvement reported by Solomon (1991). The instrument was structured to limit the length of the personal or telephone interview to a duration of approximately fifteen minutes. To achieve this, questions were basically limited to those focusing upon communications, parenting and governance.

Initial contact was made with each participating school by calling the secretary at each school site. After a brief introduction, an appointment was made for the interviewer to talk with the person in each school knowledgeable about the school's parent involvement program. In most cases the researcher was directed to either the principal or the counselor. A telephone interview was scheduled with that contact person for each school. The interview consisted of a brief description of the research project and rapport building time followed by a scripted interview. The scripted interview required each contact person to respond to the open-ended items

on the questionnaire describing current practices related to the topic of concern and the interviewer to record those responses. Care was taken to gain clarification to any response that was not totally understood by the interviewer. These interviews were conducted in September, 1994. Data gathered from the interview were compiled, classified and analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The Results

A total of 20 school sites from Northern California and Western Texas were studied in this project. The schools were of varied sizes, ranging from a low of 120 students with a faculty of seven, to a high of 1080 students with a faculty of 60. The schools represented urban, suburban and rural populations. There were no inner city schools included in the sample. The typical school surveyed was suburban with about 615 students, 33 teachers and a pupil teacher ration of 18.6 to one. This typical school had an ethnic population roughly representative of similar schools across the nation with the exception of a significantly higher Mexican-American student body.

Category 1: Communication

Most schools (90%) had a parent-teacher organization, and it had many names ranging from Parent-Teacher-Student Group, Booster Club, Dad's Club, Home-School Club, to Parent Teacher Association or PTA. One school had a Dad's Club as well as a Booster Club. Parent involvement in the formal parent-teacher organization varied. Some schools had many people pay membership dues while few parents attended meetings, others had few people pay membership dues yet those few parents attended meetings. Generally, smaller schools had informal communication networks that negated the need for a formal group where larger schools had a formal group.

The main purpose of the parent-teacher organization was threefold: (1) to raise funds for school activities, ecology/environmental or other camps, awards and rewards for students, needy students, and electronic equipment for classrooms

(video recorders, computers); (2) to host or sponsor activities such as holiday carnivals, dances, fashion shows, jog-a-thons and walk-a-thons, pancake breakfasts, family picnics, and field trips; and (3) provide leadership for newsletters, textbook selection, teacher selection and administrator selection. Book fairs, science fairs, and art fairs are planned and implemented by these active parents. Oftentimes, parent-teacher organizations have parents who assist in coaching sports and provide transportation to sporting events and field trips. These organizations have developed a variety of offerings to entice parents to become active participants in the middle school community. Some of these are a Medieval Festival or Feast for seventh grade students, History Day for all, Writer's Tea for interested students and parents, Math Steeple Chase (with 100 stations), and a Family Picnic Day.

Parent participation is also encouraged in other ways. Many schools (60%) have a School Site Council or School Improvement Board that is separate from parent-teacher type organization. Through these councils or boards, programs and activities are planned to keep open lines of communication between home and school. Curriculum is discussed, especially in reference to restructuring middle schools. Each of these programs appears to make the school a more accessible place where parents have importance.

To get parents acquainted with teachers and the school, every principal reported a Back to School Night or Orientation Night that was open to all parents. The purposes, while stated differently, was a way for parents to meet their children's teachers, to understand their children's new middle school schedule, and to show that the school was a safe place where communication was possible. In addition, an Open House was held during the spring of each year as a culminating activity showcasing the students' work.

Parent conferences were mentioned by 70% of the principals questioned. Some schools provided time during the day for parents and teachers to talk about

student progress, others provided special evening hours in order to accommodate parents who work, and one school even provided language support in both English and Spanish.

To let parents have more contact with teachers, many of the schools have provided direct telephone lines into every classroom. Most of the schools have some type of homework notification system (voice-mail; homework hot line; formal assignment book to be signed by parents on a regular basis; monthly newsletter with notification of all homework assignments; and required course outlines from every teacher with homework highlighted). In addition, 90% of the schools have a newsletter that is sent out regularly either once or twice a month. One school had a weekly newsletter! In a few cases the newsletter is sponsored by the parent-teacher organization, but more often it is sponsored by the school.

In addition, one school gave each parent a list of their children's teachers with phone numbers and times to call, asking parents to call and letting the teachers be available. One school sends home progress reports every two weeks. The reports have to be signed by parents and returned to the school. According to the principal of this school, he is "aggressive". He wants his parents involved and he will do just about anything it takes to get all parents to be active participants in the school. According to him, he will "visit every parent if it is what is needed to do!"

Category 2: Parenting Skills

Two questions were structured to gain information about parenting. One dealt with school activities the other with parenting skills. While every principal said this was an important aspect of his or her parent involvement program, there was little enthusiasm. The principals stated that oftentimes a class would be held at the school site for parents and few parents would attend. Because of lack of attendance, the classes are offered less frequently than in previous years. When asked if there would have any parenting classes this year one principal replied

"NO!" He "...hated to give a party and have no one show up." About 50% of the principals questioned stated there were classes at a higher level (i.e., the district or county) for parenting, but the school site did not sponsor such classes. The school advertised the district sponsored classes in the newsletter. These district sponsored classes were held away from the local school site from one time to four times a year.

Some schools are successful in this area, however. A small percentage of schools offered programs to parents on teen pregnancy prevention, AIDS awareness, gang awareness, conflict resolution and family life. One school presented the "Capable People" workshop and the principal boasted maximum attendance each time it was offered. The workshop is offered eight times a year to twenty-five parents, and it is "sold out" each time. This school also has an elaborate voice mail/homework hot line system where parents can leave a message for any teacher at the school as well as find out homework. And, if the parent should be put on hold, the "hold message" relates to something that was taught during the last "Capable People" workshop. The message is changed regularly and parents call the hotline to hear the new message.

Category 3: Governance

The last category dealt with parent involvement in the governance of the school. The researchers tried to determine if parents were involved in any decision making at the school site.

At first, every principal responded that parents were not involved with the governance of the school. However, when they were probed for more information, 75% of the principals remarked that the parents did have some indirect influence on school governance. One school principal said parents "helped to decide what courses were taught," yet 95% of the principals said parents were not involved with course or curriculum decisions. Two schools, or 10% of the surveyed schools reported that parents were involved in teacher selection committees and

administrator selection committees; 25% of the schools had parents serve on textbook and library book selection committees; five percent of the schools had parents on a restructuring committee and ten percent of the schools had parents on a school climate committee or discipline council. Fully 100% of the principals interviewed stated that parents were involved through the school board, the parent-teacher organization, the school site committee or the school improvement committee/board/council.

Lastly, principals were asked to respond to the final question: "If you could do one thing to improve communication with parents at your school site, and money was not the issue, what would you do?" Some principals had grand plans to change the world, while others were quite satisfied with what was happening now. Two of the principals interviewed (10%) stated they were very pleased with the communication lines they had with parents and they were pleased with the amount of parent involvement they had at their school sites. One principal had one small concern. She wanted to "have the money to send the newsletter home using the mail system and not the student system." One principal wanted to implement "a rumor hotline, in order to stop rumors quickly before they blossom out into something worse." Several of the principals (15%) stated that they did not want to implement voice mail or homework hotline systems because "we are small and personal, and we want to stay that way. Personal communication is the best link to parents and we want to keep it that way."

On a larger scale, one principal summed the concerns of many by saying "I want all parents to make their children their number one concern in life." Many principals made a statement that was similar. One principal felt that parents were "tired of parenting by the time their children were teenagers and they just wanted a break." For this principal, he wanted a "magic wand" that would bring back their (parent) interest again.

On a more realistic note, one principal wanted to hire a parent for a full time position called "Community Link." This person would be in charge of setting up a parents room/club at the school site where parents would always be welcome. The "link" would phone parents or visit parents to keep them informed about their children's success at school. The room would have a warm atmosphere, coffee and snacks, articles, videos and books on adolescents, and comfortable chairs and tables where "talk could be accomplished."

One principal stated she wanted to "allow parents to be on-campus more. I want parents to spend some time at school each quarter." Another principal wanted to "open the school during the evenings so parents can use our computers and talk to teachers." Thirty percent of the principals stated they wanted to "make the school a safe place." They wanted a place where both parents and students felt comfortable.

Two principals voiced concerns about working parents and lack of time parents have to be at school. One wanted to "let the staff have staggered hours to allow parents more school access." The other wanted to "have employers give parents time off to spend with their children in school." Regarding access to the school site, one principal wanted to "have the community college teach courses on our school site so parents could learn English or get their GED." With this increased access, school would not just be for the middle school child but for everyone in the family.

Conclusions

This study is only a beginning. Much more information needs to be gathered from rural, suburban, and urban schools. Inner city middle schools and very small combined middle/high schools need to be included for a more decisive set of results. What can be concluded is that there is parent involvement happening at the middle school level. Generally, not every parent is involved. There are some Type 3 and 4 parents who are very difficult to involve in the school.

From the results, it can be implied that parents are involved when their children are part of the activity. Hence Back to School Nights, Open Houses, Parent Conferences, Dances, school-wide events like History Day or the Medieval Feast or the Jog-A-Thon have much parent support. These events have an impact on every child and parents are more apt to be involved.

Several principals voiced a concern about the psychology of the middle school student and his/her feelings about parents. Middle school adolescents seem to be at an age where they do not want to have their parents around. One principal summed up these statements by saying "these kids weren't born, they were hatched at age 13 without any parents at all." Another principal stated "these kids do not want to be seen near their parents. One of my jobs is to get their parents involved behind the scenes without causing pain on the part of the kids." This might be one reason why newsletters are popular. Parents get the information but do not need to be on the school site to "embarrass" their children. Parent involvement comes in many ways. Sometimes it is more effective to have informed off-campus parents who like what the school is doing than inactive parents who do not have access to any information at all.

There does seem to be a small difference in perceptions between small schools and larger schools. The small school principals worked within an informal network of friends and family while the larger school principals worked within a formal network of organizations and councils. Principals from schools of both sizes felt this was the "best line of communication for them."

There is hope for improving parent involvement at the middle school. Programs have to be designed that meet parents at their home, workplace and school. When there is a person (and a place) at a school where parents can get information about homework or events, and give some time and effort, many parents will access it regardless of school size.

References

Butterworth, J. E. (1928). *The parent teacher association and its work.* New York: Macmillan.

Chapman, W. (1991). The Illinois Experience: State grants to improve schools through parent involvement. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 72(5), 355-358.

Chrispeels, J. H. (1991). District leadership in parent involvement: Policies and actions in San Diego. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 72(5), 367-371.

D'Angelo, D. A. and Adler, C. R. (1991). Chapter 1: A catalyst for improving parent involvement. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 72(5), 350-354.

Davies, D. (1991). Schools reaching out: Family, school and community partnerships for student success. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 72(5), 376-382.

Epstein, G. (1984). School policy and parent involvement: Research results. *Educational horizons,* 62(2), 70-72.

Epstein, J. L. (1991). Paths to partnership: What we can learn from federal, state, district and school initiatives. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 72(5), 344-349.

McMillen, M. (1919). *The nursery school.* London: J. J. Sent & Sons.

Nardine, F. E. and Morris, R. D. (1991). Parent involvement in the states: How firm is the commitment? *Phi Delta Kappan,* 72(5), 363-366.

Roach, P. B., Bell, D., and Salmeri, E. R. (1989-1990). The home-school link: New dimensions in the middle school preservice curriculum. *Action in Teacher Education,* 11(4), 14-17.

Solomon, Z. P. (1991). California's policy on parent involvement: State leadership for local initiatives. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 72(5), 359-362.

Uebbing, S. J. and Cooper, J. W. (1992). What do parents really want from their middle schools? *Middle School Journal,* 24(1), 52-54.

Vandegrift, J. A. and Greene, A. L. (1992). Rethinking parent involvement. *Educational Leadership,,* 50(1), 57-59.

Walberg, J. J. (1984). Families as partners in educational productionists. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 65(6) 397-400.

Warner, I. (1991). Parents in touch: District leadership for parent involvement. *Phi Delta Kappan,* 72(5), 372-375.

Appendix A

Scripted Interview/Questionnaire

1. What is the attendance of your school?
2. How would you classify your school: urban suburban rural
3. How many teachers are at your school?
4. What is the ethnic background of students at your school:
   - Anglo
   - African-American
   - Hispanic
   - Native American
   - Other (please specify)
5. Is there a parent-teacher organization?
6. What percentage of school parents are involved in the organization?
7. What does the organization do for the school?
8. What does the school do to encourage parent participation inside the classroom?
9. What does the school do to encourage parent participation outside of the classroom?
10. Does the school have a voice mail system for teachers/parents/students?
11. Does the school have a homework notification system?
12. What else does the school do to encourage parent participation?
13. Is there a parent information night about school activities, school programs, or school classes (such as drug prevention, AIDS awareness, etc.)?
14. Are there classes/session for parents about parenting?
15. Do parents participate in the governance of the school?
16. Do parents helps in deciding what courses are to be taught?
17. Do parents help in deciding what sports are to be emphasized?
18. Are parents involved in any type of decision making for the school?
19. If you could do one thing to improve communication with parents at your school site, and money was not the issue, what would you do?